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Dana P. Jacobson, Publisher/Managing Editor
Joseph Mirando, Managing Editor
Rob Mahlert, Associate Editor

Atari Online News, Etc. Staff

Dana P. Jacobson -- Editor
Joe Mirando -- "People Are Talking"
Michael Burkley -- "Unabashed Atariophile"
Albert Dayes -- "CC: Classic Chips"
Rob Mahlert -- Web site
Thomas J. Andrews -- "Keeper of the Flame"

With Contributions by:

Fred Horvat

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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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There are heat waves, and then there are HEAT WAVES!! So far, the past six days here in my area have been in the 90's. Not just 90 or 91, but mid to upper 90's, with at least one of those days hitting 100 degrees! Working outside in that heat (and humidity!) was a challenge. Fortunately, we were spared somewhat, by working part-days. In part it was for our health, but also because to protect the golf course and the machinery - that much heat takes a toll on that stuff also. It's been a long week, and, again, I'm exhausted.

So, it's late, as usual for me at the end of the week. I just don't have the energy to do much more than finish putting this issue together and get it out at a reasonable timeframe. No commentary again this week, unfortunately. So, as I seek some refuge with some air conditioning, I'll let you all seek your mode of relief, and enjoy this week's issue.

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. First of all, let me apologize for missing last week's issue.

Unfortunately, my laptop was acting up and kept me from being able to get a column done.

It's back up and running now, but the keyboard was, for lack of a better description, useless. It seems that I'm somewhat hard on keyboards. I must pound on them a lot harder than I realize, because I usually get about a year out of a keyboard before I have to replace it. Yes, that's right, i replace the keyboard on my laptop. I've actually gotten pretty good at it. I can remove the old keyboard and replace it with a new one in about 6 minutes.

Basically, the problem this time was the spacebar. Sometimes it took 2 or three ’thumps’ to get a space, and sometimes I would get two or three spaces from hitting the spacebar once.

So I did what any geek would do... fired up my browser and searched eBay for a replacement.

I got burned the last time I had to find a replacement keyboard for the laptop. I found one, either bid on or bought it outright after comparing the picture, description and part number of the keyboard offered. I waited patiently for it to arrive, opened the bulk-rate shipping envelope when it arrived... and found that it was the wrong keyboard. Very wrong. It was simply not what was pictured or described or promised. Whoever packed up the thing must have just plain grabbed the wrong one and not known any better.

I emailed the seller and pointed out that it was the incorrect item, hoping to get the thing straightened out quickly.

"No problem," they said, "just mail it back to us with postage to cover the new shipping, and we’ll get it resolved as soon as we receive it".

I was stunned. I re-emailed the company, asking if I understood them correctly. Did they really expect me to pay not only shipping costs to return to them the incorrect item that they sent me, but also shipping costs to actually GET the correct one? Yes, they explained. Shipping costs were not covered under their return policy, and since my purchase was for the price of the item PLUS shipping, they felt that shipping should be paid again. Shipping each was cost almost as much as the new keyboard (they’re cheap, mass produced things, and the big cost is usually installing them in the laptop case, but since I’ve done it a couple of times before..), and I wasn’t about to end up paying almost twice the cost of the item for shipping just to fix their mistake. So I kept it. I still have it somewhere, as a matter of fact, if you’re interested. I even tried re-selling it on eBay, but had no takers.

So this time, before I ordered or bid, I emailed the company (a different company) and asked them not only what their return policy was but gave them the specific example and asked how they would handle it. "Oh," they replied, "we would send you a ’call tag’ with the new keyboard and you could just send the incorrect one back to us without having to pay for it".

Yay! Right answer! So I ordered. I even received it in good time, having installed it yesterday in plenty of time to get my column out of the way... I thought.

Actually, there WAS one snafu. The keyboard connects to the main board of the laptop with this little plastic connector. You know the kind. The connection is a silk-screened piece of plastic and at the end of that there is a plastic connector that fits into another connector on the motherboard.

Well, that connector was not supplied on the new keyboard. Damn. I went to the website and checked... sure enough, although it wasn’t mentioned in the description, the picture of the keyboard clearly showed a ’bare’ piece of plastic with the conductors ’painted’ on it.

Okay, my bad. So I grabbed the old keyboard, since it was useless anyway, and tried to carefully remove the hard plastic connector. Damn. I broke

the tabs that hold the two parts of the connector together. Well, I pressed on anyway. I was able to insert the mylar strip into the connector and close it around the thing until two drops of that instant glue stuff (yes, I'm avoiding brand names here) effectively fused the two halves together forever. I took a deep breath and inserted the keyboard side of the connector into the MoBo side of the connector and held the breath as I 'flipped the switch'.

It fired up and everything is lovely again... for now. Until my incessant hammering on the keyboard ruins this one too. Maybe by that time I'll be able to afford a new laptop instead of a $14.00 replacement keyboard. Who knows? Stranger things HAVE happened, and laptop prices HAVE been coming down as their abilities have been catching up quickly with desktop models. I even read recently that laptop sales either HAVE or WILL top desktop sales for the first time ever. Pretty cool stuff. Who would have thunk it during the old days of the STacy? I certainly wouldn't have.

Well that's about it for this week, friends and neighbors. I think that next week I'll probably have to tell you about my latest foray into the dark, strange world of medical treatment (nothing serious, but I DO have some observations to make). Until then, keep your ear to the ground, your shoulder to the wheel, you back against the wall and your eye on the horizon... and see if you can get any work done THAT way. [grin]

So until next week, just keep your ears open so that you'll hear what they're saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - New PS3 with Bigger Memory!
  """"""""""""""""""""""""""""""" Bye-bye Trolls?
  Blizzard Retracts Policy!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
  """""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Sony To Introduce New PlayStation3 with Bigger Memory

Electronics giant Sony said Tuesday it will introduce an upgraded PlayStation 3 videogame console in Japan at the end of July, with a bigger memory and a new white version on offer.

The company will sell a 160-gigabyte model for 29,980 yen (341 dollars), the same price at which the Tokyo-based company had previously offered

its 120-gigabyte console, it said in a statement.

It will also introduce a 320-gigabyte model for 34,980 yen. Both models will be available from July 29 in Japan. Sony did not indicate worldwide release plans in the statement.

The move comes amid heightened competition between Sony and gaming rival Microsoft, with both giants looking to release motion-sensing controllers later this year in response to the runaway success of Nintendo’s Wii.

PlayStation Move wands will hit the market in time for the year-end holiday shopping season in the United States.

The devices let PS3 play be controlled with swings, jabs and other natural movements instead of toggle-and-button commands that have been trademarks of play on PS3 and rival Xbox 360 consoles by Microsoft.

Microsoft’s Kinet technology will use a 3-D camera and gesture recognition software to let people play videogames using natural body movements instead of hand-held controllers.

Bye-bye Trolls? Blizzard Forums To Use Real Names

Activision Blizzard Inc.’s move to require people to use their real names if they want to post messages in online forums for games is the latest sign that online anonymity is falling out of favor with many companies.

The upcoming change has upset many gamers who prize anonymity and don’t necessarily want their gamer personas associated with their real identities.

Blizzard, the maker of "World of Warcraft," said Tuesday that the new rule will go into effect later this month. It will apply first to forums about the highly anticipated "StarCraft II," out July 27; other games are to follow.

Blizzard hopes that making people use their real names will cut down on nasty behavior in the forums and create a more positive environment. Players will have the option - but not a requirement - to display the name of their main game character alongside their real name.

Marc Rotenberg, executive director of the Electronic Privacy Information Center, said Blizzard is the latest company to require real identities. But he added businesses have "a lot of freedom" in doing so.

Facebook, the world’s most popular online social network, asks users to sign up with their real names. The company tries to delete fake profiles it comes across. A growing number of blogs and news sites are also abandoning anonymity. The Buffalo News said last month it will start requiring commenters on its website to give their real names and the towns they live in, just as they would do in a printed letter to the editor.

Online games are among the last truly anonymous frontiers. As such, Rotenberg called Blizzard’s decision a "bit of a sad day" in the world of gaming.

"Part of the fun of the online gaming would was the sense that you could construct a character different form who you were in the real world," he said.

"World of Warcraft" has more than 11.5 million subscribers who pay monthly fees to play the game worldwide.

Under Pressure, Blizzard Retracts Real ID Policy

Whether gutsy, forward-thinking, or just plain scatterbrained, Blizzard's plans to force you to use your real name when posting to the company's official forums have been shelved just three days after the company announced them.

In a forum statement dispatched this morning (Friday), Blizzard CEO Mike Morhaine explained that the company had listened to player feedback (broadly negative) and reconsidered the matter internally.

"As a result of those discussions," wrote Morhaine, "we've decided at this time that real names will not be required for posting on official Blizzard forums."

The response was instant and overwhelming: Hundreds of kudos, ranging from enthusiastic thank-you's to grateful albeit more reserved acceptance. While the former were unreservedly jubilant, the latter seem to view Blizzard's move as temporary damage control after the original decision on Tuesday triggered waves of caustic disdain.

"You should never, ever place much trust in a corporation," wrote one user of the course reversal. "It's a purely business relationship (at least for them) and it always will be."

"They're not changing [the name display policy] for now. They might in the future. They can't deliver in absolutes because no company is stupid enough to give absolutes."

"What baffles me is that they thought we wanted this garbage in the first place," wrote another, likening the issue to simple misguidance. "I do have [F]acebook and I use it sparingly to keep in touch with a couple of my friends from college and the like.

"I do not use it to keep in touch with my gaming friends. I use...games and Ventrilo to keep in touch with my gaming friends. Duh, Blizzard, duh."

Real ID will remain an optional feature on the gaming side, as planned, wrote Morhaine. It's already live in World of Warcraft, and the same opt-in system will grace StarCraft II's interface when Blizzard's sci-fi real-time strategy game launches later this month.

Specifically, when the new StarCraft II boards go live, Morhaine says you'll post with your StarCraft II Battle.net character name plus character code, not your real name, as previously planned. The same will apply to Blizzard's Cataclysm forums when they launch in tandem with the upcoming World of Warcraft expansion.

While that solves Blizzard's suddenly unpleasant image problem, it's

probably not the end of it. "Over time, we will continue to evolve Real ID on Battle.net to add new and exciting functionality within our games for players who decide to use the feature," wrote Morhaine.

Translation? Rule nothing out, long term.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Interpol Asks Web Surfers To Help Catch Fugitives

International police agency Interpol on Monday urged Internet users to help track down hundreds of fugitives wanted for murder, rape, child sexual abuse and other serious crimes.

The round-up operation was launched on May 3 targeting 450 people either convicted or suspected of serious offences and wanted by, or believed to be located in, 29 countries.

More than 100 fugitives have already been arrested or located worldwide, the agency based in the French city of Lyon said in a statement.

The arrests included some high-profile suspects such as former Colombian model Angie Sanclemente Valencia, caught in May in Argentina where she is wanted for drug-trafficking, and Mouamba Munanga from the Democratic Republic of Congo, wanted by France and Bahrain for counterfeit currency and money-laundering, who was picked up in South Africa on June 16.

"The operation has been very successful in locating and arresting a large number of these targets, but what we are now left with are the cases where we have no new information on their whereabouts, which is why we are asking for the public to help," said Martin Cox, assistant director of Interpol's Fugitive Investigative Support (FIS) unit.

Interpol has released to the public pictures of 26 fugitives to back its appeal for help from Internet users, especially on social networking sites and chatrooms.

"It is more likely that someone will recognize one these fugitives from a social networking site or a chatroom than spotting them walking down the street," Cox said.

But he added: "No matter how a member of the public has the information, we would ask that they pass it on."

Information on the whereabouts of the fugitives or any internationally wanted person can be sent to fugitive@interpol.int, or be given anonymously to national Crime Stoppers programmes or via www.csiworld.org.

US Largely Ruling Out N. Korea in 2009 Cyberattacks

U.S. officials have largely ruled out North Korea as the origin of a computer attack last July that took down U.S. and South Korean government websites, according to cybersecurity experts.

But authorities are not much closer than they were a year ago to knowing exactly who did it - and why.

In the days after the fast-moving, widespread attack, analysis pointed to North Korea as the likely starting point because code used in the attack included Korean language and other indicators. Experts now say there is no conclusive evidence that North Korea, or any other nation, orchestrated it.

The crippling strikes, known as "denial of service" attacks, did not compromise security or breach any sensitive data or critical systems. Officials and experts say the agencies are better prepared today. But they acknowledge that many government and business sites remain vulnerable to similar intrusions.

The incidents underscore the increasing threats posed by computer-based attacks, and how they can disrupt service as well as inflame political tensions.

Pinpointing the culprits for such attacks is difficult or even impossible, officials say. Some suggest the July 4 weekend attacks a year ago may have been designed as a political broadside.

These officials point suspicions at South Koreans, possibly activists, who are concerned about the threat from North Korea and would be looking to ramp up antagonism toward their neighbor. Several experts familiar with the investigation spoke on condition of anonymity because the results are not final.

According to U.S. officials and private computer analysts, the attacks were largely restricted to vandalizing the public Web pages of about a half dozen federal agencies, including the Treasury Department and the Federal Trade Commission. About three dozen other sites were targeted, including some private companies and a number of South Korean government sites, which reportedly had the most damage.

While the questions of who did it and why are unanswered, many investigators and experts now do not consider it a critical case.

"It’s about as frightening as someone driving around the block blowing their horn a lot," said James Lewis, cybersecurity expert and a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "A lot of people could have done it, and it doesn’t leave a lot of clues to their identity."

To Don Jackson, director of threat intelligence for Atlanta-based SecureWorks, a computer security consulting company, "it’s a dead end as far as who did it. I don’t think we’ve ever gone past that."

Those responsible, he said, "pulled it off so well, managed it so well - this was someone who has experience at running these types of attacks."

Jackson, whose company was among several private firms that studied the codes after the attack, said one possibility is that hackers in South Korea were the culprits.

South Korean sources had a mission and may have "wanted someone blamed for it," said Jackson. "It would further the point that North Korea has elite squads" of hackers targeting Seoul.

South Korean officials have pointed to North Korea as the suspected assailant, and experts agree that it is within the North's abilities to wage cyberattacks. More recently, however, a government-run website in South Korea was hit with a similar - although smaller - denial of service attack that officials said was traced to China.

"There are a number of national intelligence agencies who are creating cybercapabilities. It's a natural area of exploration," said retired Gen. Wesley Clark. "I wouldn't underestimate North Korea's potential in this space."

Denial of service attacks, Lewis said, don't leave detailed forensic clues that a more directed intrusion, such as an effort to breach a sensitive government program, might leave.

Still, officials worry that even a large, well executed attack against critical controlling computer servers could interrupt service if directed at a power company or utility. A strike could disrupt financial markets if directed at Wall Street or hinder travel if aimed at transportation sectors.

Those systems tend to be more heavily protected. But an attack against a bank's website could prevent customers from having online access to their accounts and prevent them from paying bills. Such attacks can prove lucrative as an extortion tool, when hackers take down popular gambling sites and demand payment to end the disruption.

Despite the lack of a clear culprit, there are things investigators do know about last year's denial of service attack.

The malicious computer code was distributed through nine main control servers in four countries. It fanned out to infect about 60,000 computers around the world. Those computers - likely on the desktops of innocent victims - were linked together in what is called a botnet, and they flooded government websites with traffic, knocking them offline or slowing them down over the Independence Day holiday weekend.

Altogether, 43 sites were targeted, and the size of the attack suggested it required several people to carry it out. While some Treasury, FTC and State Department sites were slowed or shut down by the software attack, others such as the White House and Department of Homeland Security were able to fend it off with little disruption.

Other targets included Nasdaq and New York Stock Exchange, Voice of America, U.S. Postal Service, and Amazon and Yahoo.

Government officials and analysts say there has been some improvements in dealing with future strikes. Private contractors, such as the web hosting giant Akamai, has a redundant system that will move government sites to other servers if one is seeing an unusual or massive flow of traffic.

Agencies are now better prepared.

But, Jackson said, "as far as any better capability in tracking down actors or in attributing attacks to any individual or group, I don’t know that we’re any further along. I would seriously doubt it."

Natural Disasters and Global Warming Fuel the Malware Flames

Malware and spam developers understand that the easiest way to lure a user into clicking on a link, opening a file attachment, or reading a message is to target hot topics that those users are already interested in and discussing around the proverbial water cooler. AppRiver, a provider of e-mail and Web security solutions, has compiled a report based on the first half of 2010 analyzing the current threat from malware and spam, and highlighting the opportunistic nature of the attacks.

In general, people are good. They want to contribute, and offer support in a crisis to help their fellow man. Sadly - and ironically - nobody understands the altruism and caring of the population better than the minority that would rather exploit it and capitalize on events for a quick profit.

One of the easiest targets for spam and malware is natural disasters. When events like the earthquakes in Haiti and Chile, or the massive volcano eruption in Iceland capture the headlines, people are curious about the details and anxious to offer support in any way they can. In the wake of such disasters, users are very likely to click on and respond to invitations that seem even remotely legitimate.

AppRiver reports that within days of such events malware and spam threats begin to rise. AppRiver found 419 phishing scams purporting to be charities seeking donations for natural disaster victims, as well as attackers using spam and Web links targeted at keywords related to the disaster to siphon money and spread malware.

Unless you consider the noise pollution of the vuvuzelas, the FIFA 2010 World Cup tournament is not a natural disaster. Still, a global event focused on the most popular sport in the world (outside of the bubble of the United States at least), with an expected audience of 30 billion is simply too enticing for malware developers to pass up. Fans eager to follow the spectacle are gullible targets for World Cup-themed attacks.

Another popular theme that attackers appear to have targeted is global warming. Everyone else is "going green", so why not malware? Attackers launched a spear phishing campaign targeted at companies involved in cap and trade programs to steal carbon credits. It is estimated that attackers stole as many as 250,000 carbon credits valued around $4 million.

The AppRiver report explains "The emails pretended to be from the German Emissions Trading Authority who is responsible for handling the implementation of emissions trading as per the Kyoto Protocol. Recipients were told that they needed to re-register their accounts with the Agency and when they did, the attackers gained complete access to these accounts."

One thing seems consistent throughout the AppRiver report: attackers are opportunistic. Whether its natural disasters, global sporting events, tax time, or the death of a celebrity, attackers will take advantage of current events to greatly increase their odds of success.

Obviously, companies should have security measures in place to identify malware threats, weed out unwanted spam e-mail, and generally guard against cyber attacks. But, IT administrators should also be aware of breaking news, and prepared to be more vigilant in detecting and blocking threats related
to major events.

Atlanta Has Dubious Honor of Highest Malware Infection Rate

New York and Los Angeles are major metropolitan areas with exponentially larger populations than most other US cities, so they lead the way for total volume of malware infections. If you break the infection rate down per capita based on population, though, Atlanta comes out on top (or is it on the bottom?) of the heap with the highest malware infection rate.

map displaying the infection rate in cities across the United States. If you are looking to establish or relocate a business, perhaps you should consult the map first to avoid regions that seem more prone to malware infection.

"Malware makers are becoming more and more sophisticated, and the risk they pose to your computer and your valuable personal information is growing," says Enigma Software Group CEO Alvin Estevez. "We think it’s important to keep an eye on where the malware is doing the most damage and our Malware Tracker map helps us and consumers know what’s going on."

The Enigma Software Group map shows overall malware infection rates, but also allows you to drill down by specific malware threats - displaying results specific to the top 10 current malware threats. According to a statement from Enigma, it "recently pulled a 30-day history of infections in the 100 largest cities in the United States. Not surprisingly, New York City had the most infections - because New York has the most computers. But when the number of infections was factored in as a percentage of a city’s population, New York ended up near the bottom of the list and Atlanta, Georgia came out on top."

Birmingham AL, Denver CO, Chesapeake VA, and Madison WI round out the top five worst cities. On the other end of the spectrum, Jersey City, NJ has the lowest per capita malware infection rate, followed by Santa Ana CA, Detroit MI, Boise ID, and Memphis TN.

So, is there something special about Jersey City, NJ that makes it impervious to malware attack? Is there something insidious about Atlanta, GA that invites malicious software infections? Or is it purely random chance?

I asked Estevez for additional insight related to these findings, and he responded to say "It’s impossible for us to guess why any particular city is at the top or bottom of the list at any given time. But one thing we DO know is that any time you have a city with high Internet connectivity and a large population of younger people, the internet traffic is higher and so is the risk for malware infections. Atlanta is

a well-connected and relatively young city (the average age of its citizens is five years less than the national average)."

Perhaps areas with greater Internet connectivity and younger populations are also more involved in the world, and more likely to respond to scams and malware attacks exploiting natural disasters and other global catastrophes to steal identities and compromise PCs.

Based on that analysis, it seems that there is no need to choose a city, or shy away from a given region based on the malware infection rates. However, analyzing the malware infection rate for your area may indicate an increased need to improve malware defenses and provide additional security awareness training for users to protect company computers and network resources from suffering the same fate as the rest of the area if your business is located in a region with a notably high per capita malware infection rate.

Google’s China License Problem Remains Unresolved

After five days of waiting, Google is still in the dark about whether the company’s operating license in China will be renewed.

As of Monday morning, Beijing time, the search engine giant had yet to hear back from the Chinese government regarding the license, said Jessica Powell, a Google spokeswoman.

The license, which is issued by the Chinese authorities, is necessary for Google to continue operating its China-based Web site, Google.cn. But tensions between the company and Chinese officials have put the license’s renewal in doubt.

In March, Google decided to stop censoring the results to its Google.cn search engine by shutting the site down. All internet traffic from the site was then redirected to Google’s uncensored Hong Kong search engine. The move quickly angered Chinese officials, who demanded that the company comply with Chinese laws that require companies to censor search results.

Now, with Google’s operating license up for renewal the company has decided to take a step back from its previous actions in a bid to comply with government demands. Last week, Google.cn was restored as a "landing page," where users are given a link to the company’s Hong Kong page rather than automatically redirected to it.

Since Google’s license went up for renewal last Wednesday, the company’s web search services have also been partially blocked in China. Google Suggest, a feature that provides probable search terms when user types their query, continues to be blocked, Powell said.

Google Wins Permission To Keep Website in China

Google won permission Friday to maintain its website in China and keep its toehold in the world’s most populous nation after bowing to pressure to eliminate a virtual detour around the country’s online censorship

requirements.

Entering search requests at Google.cn from within mainland China now requires an extra click, a change made last week to appease communist regulators. Users who click anywhere on the page are then taken to a site based in Hong Kong, which isn't subject to Beijing's censorship rules.

Since March, Google had been automatically rerouting search requests from the mainland to the Hong Kong service.

The small concession was enough to persuade China's regulators to renew Google's Internet license for at least another year, the company said. There was no immediate statement on the website of China's Internet regulator, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

It's the latest twist in a diplomatic dance that's been unfolding since Google vowed in January to end its four-year practice of omitting search results that the Chinese government considers subversive or pornographic. Google reversed course after blaming Chinese computer hackers for an attack aimed at stealing the company's technology and e-mail information from human rights activists.

As soon as Google published a Jan. 12 blog post publicly challenging China's censorship polices, "it became clear that Google.cn could never operate the same way again," Internet analyst Scott Kessler of Standard & Poor's said.

Even if Web surfers in mainland China click on Google.cn to get to the Hong Kong search engine, China's government can still block results by using technology controls commonly known as its "Great Firewall."

Google and the Chinese government have been trying to uphold their conflicting principles while protecting their economic interests.

Google Inc., based in Mountain, View, Calif., wants to remain in China because the country is expected to be an Internet gold mine for decades. China's government seems to realize losing a technology powerhouse would be a setback in its effort to cultivate more innovation and raise its citizens' standard of living.

The latest compromise threatens to curtail Google's growth in China simply because it requires hundreds of millions of users to take an extra step to get to Google's search engine. The single additional click could diminish traffic and send Web surfers to more convenient options, such as the homegrown Baidu.com.

If that happens, Google will have fewer opportunities to show the ads that bring in virtually all its revenue.

Still, investors were relieved that Google get did not get kicked out of China's rapidly growing Internet market. Google shares edged up on the news, gaining $10.93, or 2.4 percent, to close Friday at $467.49. The stock remains down by about 25 percent so far this year, partly because of fallout from the company's stand against China's stringent censorship rules.

Google already has been losing ground in China. The company's search market share in China now stands at about 30 percent, down from roughly 35 percent at the end of last year, according to the research firm Analysys International. Baidu's share has risen slightly to about 60

percent.

China is not yet a big moneymaker for Google, accounting for an estimated $250 million to $600 million of Google’s projected $28 billion in revenue this year.

But China is expected to become far more lucrative as its economy matures and even more of its population comes online. Susquehanna Financial Group analyst Marianne Wolk believes Google could be pulling in $5 billion to $6 billion annually from China’s online advertising market just four years from now if it can manage to keep its market share in the 30 percent range.

The makeover of Google.cn is bound to hurt the company, but "it’s a sacrifice well worth making if it means they can stay in China," Kessler said.

Google’s ambitions in China extend beyond Web searches. The renewed Internet license, set to expire in 2012, means Google can continue offering music, language translation and shopping-comparison services throughout the Chinese website. The company also is trying to get a license for an online mapping service and is hoping to build up its mobile phone business in China, which has been derailed in recent months.

Motorola Inc. had replaced Google services with rival offerings from Baidu, and Google postponed the launch of two phones that were supposed to rely on its Android software.

But all of Google’s peripheral services could suffer if its main traffic magnet, the search engine, loses its allure in China.

Ad spending will shift to Baidu and other Chinese sites, predicted Vincent Kobler, managing director of EmporioAsia Leo Burnett, an ad buyer for a list of customers that includes Marriott International. He said the firm was recommending clients switch to Baidu.

"Even last year, before this crisis, Baidu always was in a stronger position," Kobler said. "In terms of media buying, customers in general... are still more comfortable with Baidu."

For Beijing, the renewal tones down a high-profile dispute at a time when American and European businesses are complaining about unfair treatment by the government and saying China has become less accommodating to foreign businesses.

Renewing Google’s license "was a smart move on the part of the Chinese government to kind of defuse the situation," said Paul Denlinger, an Internet consultant for startups. He doubts the friction between Google and China will disappear but thinks it will dissipate for now.

New Internet Sales Tax Bill Is Introduced

Federal officials keep trying to chip away at the longstanding rules that have prevented online shoppers from paying sales taxes for purchases made online and out of state.

The latest effort, CNET reports, comes from Democratic Rep. Bill Delahunt

of Massachusetts. He wants to rip out the framework of mail-order sales taxes as we know them and replace it with a new one.

Delahunt isn t just looking to relax the anti-tax sentiment on the Web, he pretty much wants to rip the whole thing out altogether. The latest version of his Main Street Fairness Act - just introduced formally - would essentially establish a national sales tax collection system, using a 2002 Act called the Streamlined Sales Tax Agreement to simplify the convoluted system of state, county, and city taxes that every physical retailer has to collect.

CNET says 24 states have signed on to the Streamlined Sales Tax Agreement, and brick-and-mortar retailers including Wal-Mart, Target and IKEA have rallied behind Delahunt s attempts to normalize online and offline sales.

This issue, shockingly, has been in front of lawmakers since 1992, when the Supreme Court first decreed that states cannot levy sales taxes on operators that aren t physically located there. This has led to some nasty skirmishes between various states and larger online retailers - most notably with New York's attempt to collect sales tax from Amazon.com after arguing (successfully) that the company s affiliate sales (by individuals who put up virtual stores to sell goods via the Amazon website) constituted a physical presence. Amazon responded by canceling the affiliate accounts of everyone in the state - and two other states that tried the same trick.

Delahunt s bill is far from becoming a law. Stay tuned as it winds its way through Congress which may be not be very far, as the bill currently has zero Republican support and little more from a cash-strapped populace.

Mozilla Releases First of Firefox 4 Betas for Testing

Mozilla has launched an early beta of the Firefox 4 browser and plans to release further betas for testing every two to three weeks. The goal, Mozilla said, is to improve the development process by receiving feedback from developers quickly and getting fixes and changes tested earlier than in previous Firefox development cycles.

"Firefox 4 beta 1 includes dozens of major features and improvements," wrote Firefox Director Mike Beltzner in a blog. "By testing them early, we'll be able to respond to your feedback for future versions."

The most noticeable improvement to Firefox 4 has to do with the look of the browser. "We moved the tabs to the top to make it easier to focus on the web content and easier to control the tools in your web browser," Beltzner wrote. "Also, if you have Windows 7 or Windows Vista, the Menu bar was replaced with a single Firefox button so you can get to the most-used options with just one click."

The other big visual change is the addition of support for the new HTML5-based WebM video format being championed by Google. "If you're part of the YouTube HTML5 beta, WebM videos should play pretty well," Mozilla blogger Christopher Blizzard wrote.

What's more, Mozilla's initial Firefox 4 beta integrates strong support for hardware-based video acceleration. "If you're using HTML5 video and you go full screen, we'll use OpenGL on Macs or Linux and DirectX 9 on

Windows to accelerate video rendering," Blizzard wrote. "If you're on Windows 7 or an updated Windows Vista, we also have full support for D2D-enabled rendering."

These changes are welcome improvements and part of the heated-up browser war, noted Al Hilwa, program director of applications development software at IDC.

"While browsers themselves are free to consumers, they have become money-making gateways to the Internet, and, as gatekeepers, browser vendors stand to gain financially by charging for routing to search engines and other potential sites," Hilwa said. "Mozilla makes quite a bit of money out of Google, which explains why Google is so eager to be a leader in the browser space itself."

Hilwa expects that all browsers will implement the WebM video standard within a year. "But it may take another three to five years for users to be on the latest browser releases, so the journey to standardize the video inside of HTML is just beginning," he said.

Under the hood, Firefox 4 integrates a new add-on manager that provides users with more space to handle add-ons, themes and plug-ins. Developers also will be able to build Firefox add-ons more quickly using the new Jetpack SDK to safely connect to existing libraries using js-ctypes.

With Firefox 4, users will no longer have to restart the browser in order to install a new add-on or recover from a crash. "When a plug-in crashes or freezes, you can resume browsing by simply refreshing the page," Beltzner wrote.

Firefox is known for its add-ons, where it has established one of the richest environments for new capabilities, positioning it as a platform unto itself, Hilwa noted. "We are seeing these HTML extensions and apps becoming important for browser vendors because it creates stickiness with users," Hilwa said. "Safari is building a more robust extension system as well."

Future beta releases of Firefox 4 will enable users to synchronize settings, passwords, bookmarks, history, open tabs, and other customizations across multiple devices. Mozilla also expects to add "support for a JavaScript-driven full-screen API for video," Blizzard wrote.

Newspapers Look for Ways To Profit in Internet Age

Newspapers worldwide are being forced to reinvent themselves for the Internet age - and will be watching closely the success of two experiments launched in London, analysts say.

Suffering a long-term fall in sales and a collapse in advertising revenue as the world goes online for its news, the press has for years been scrambling to decide how to respond.

In Britain, Rupert Murdoch's Times and Sunday Times finally went ahead from Friday with their long-promised plan to start charging readers for online access to their journalism, the first non-specialist papers to do so here.

The move comes after the less expected news last week that London's city-wide daily, the Evening Standard, hopes to break even after turning itself into a freesheet for commuters, ditching its 50 pence cover price.

That decision cut the paper's distribution costs from 30 to four pence per copy, and sent readership soaring from just over half a million to 1.3 million, its new Russian owners said last week.

"The industry is still at a very early stage of this rapid evolution forced on it by digital technology," Karin von Abrams, a senior analyst at eMarketer, told AFP.

"The game clearly has changed for most old business models, but we don't yet know what the successful new ones are going to be."

For newspapers, one model to study is that of the freesheets.

The Metro, a free morning paper available at train stations and on public transport in 16 British cities, is read by more than 3.5 million people every weekday, according to the National Readership Survey (NRS).

Owned by the Daily Mail and General Trust, it relies entirely on advertising revenue.

Over the past seven years it has consistently performed well, even making an operating profit through the worst of the economic crisis, to the envy of the traditional dailies.

More recently, the Evening Standard was a well-established but loss-making London evening paper until its new owner, Russian tycoon Alexander Lebedev, bought the paper in 2009 and turned it into a freesheet.

Access to commuters seems to be a key to the success of the free model.

The Metro, the Standard and the City AM, another successful but smaller London freesheet aimed at business people, are all handed out near tube and train stations.

This saves on costs. And with the demise of two free evening rivals last year, the morning and evening papers have something of a captive market. This, of course, appeals to advertisers.

"Giving away print works if the free circulation is relatively high and there is a good advertising base for the printed version.

"It is easier to gain advertising in print than online and the prices are higher," Professor Robert G. Picard, a media economics expert from Sweden's Jonkoping International Business School, told AFP.

"The Evening Standard model has shown that the freesheet model is well worth exploring," adds George Brock, professor and head of journalism at City University London.

"But it's not right to assume all newspapers can perform the same trick," he told AFP.

He points out that freesheets don't have high editorial costs: they don't invest in lifestyle features, foreign correspondents or business experts. "That wouldn't keep a general newspaper competing," he told AFP.

So if free print is not the answer, should newspaper websites follow Murdoch’s lead and retreat behind a paywall?

"News Corp has no more idea than the rest of us if this is going to work," says Brock, who believes it will take months to gauge the reactions of readers and journalists to the paywalls.

Eventually though, analysts agree most newspapers will have to find a way of making money from their websites.

Business paper The Financial Times makes readers pay for online content, while the Wall Street Journal - also part of Murdoch’s media empire - is currently the only major US paper charging readers for full access online.

The New York Times announced in January that it would start charging for online content in early 2011.

"It does seem that many serious news sites will follow Murdoch’s lead and charge for their content, or at least establish some kind of content menu, allowing readers to choose from a range of one-time charges, subscription periods and so on," predicts Abrams.

"This is not very expensive to institute, and so can be tried experimentally."

Brock, too, is in favour of a pick and choose model. His advice to the embattled newspapers industry is to "get into a charging experiment" to discover what works and what doesn’t.

"Newspapers need to experiment aggressively, they need a way of getting people to pay for the value they’re getting," he says."

For Picard, this means offering the readers something unique.

"Paywalls will only work if the news and information behind the wall is not available elsewhere for free - such as television, radio, free papers, or the Internet - or if it is of such high quality or adds services not available in print versions," he concludes.

Reading On Paper Is Faster Than iBooks on the iPad

It will take you longer to read a book on an iPad or Kindle compared to the printed page, according to a recent study. Dr. Jakob Nielsen of the Nielsen Norman Group - a product development consultancy that is not associated with Nielsen, the metrics company - compared the reading times of 24 users on the Kindle 2, an iPad using the iBooks application, a PC monitor and good old fashioned paper. The study found that reading on an electronic tablet was up to 10.7 percent slower than reading a printed book. Despite the slower reading times, Nielsen found that users preferred reading books on a tablet device compared to the paper book. The PC monitor, meanwhile, was universally hated as a reading platform among all test subjects.

Nielsen’s findings were based on the performance of 24 users who "like reading and frequently read books." The subjects each read different

short stories by Ernest Hemingway on all four platforms, and were measured for their reading speeds and story comprehension. Overall, it took each user an average of 17 minutes and 20 seconds to read a story regardless of the platform and comprehension levels were virtually identical on all four reading formats. However, Nielsen says the printed book was the clear winner in terms of speed. Users were reading 6.2 percent slower on an iPad compared to paper, and 10.7 percent slower on the Kindle 2. Nielsen did not provide any statistics on the reading time for the PC monitor.

Interestingly, Nielsen's results appear to show that reading on the iPad is significantly faster compared to the Kindle 2. But Nielsen was quick to dismiss this conclusion arguing that the reading speeds between the two devices were "not statistically significant." "The difference [between reading times on the iPad and Kindle 2] would be so small that it wouldn't be a reason to buy one over the other," Nielsen wrote.

The study also asked each user to rate how they liked each format on a scale of 1-7. The iPad, Kindle 2 and printed book were nearly tied at 5.8, 5.7 and 5.6 respectively, while the PC monitor ranked last at 3.6 points. The test subjects said that reading on the PC felt too much like being at work, while they found it more relaxing to read a printed book than on an electronic device.

So it appears technology hasn't quite figured out yet how to replicate the experience of the printed page. That said this study leaves a lot to be desired owing to its small test group size, but it would be interesting to see a similar study on a much larger scale. I'd be curious to find out, for example, if there's any big difference in reading speeds based on age groups.

Would people in their 20s read faster on a screen than a book since they've spent a majority of their lives consuming digital content? How would the younger group compare to people in their late thirties and early forties who also grew up with electronic devices such as the Commodore Vic-20, the original Mac and IBM clones?

This study also left out reading on a laptop, which is a far more mobile reading experience than a desktop PC and could therefore be more enjoyable. I'd also like to know if the iPad would remain a faster reading experience than the Kindle in a larger study. On the one hand, the iPad can render a new page faster than the Kindle, which could account for the uptick in speed. But you would think the Kindle's ability to closely mimic the printed page, thanks to its e-ink display, would bring its reading speeds closer to the traditional book.

Regardless of how fast people can read on an electronic device, the e-reader is becoming more popular every year. E-books raked in $313 million in 2009 growing by 176.6 percent compared to 2008 overtaking audio book sales. In 2010, e-book sales are currently growing at a rate of 217.3 percent versus 2009, according to estimates by the Association of American Publishers.

GeoCities is Shutting Down

The 90s are over. Like, really over. Even more over now than they were a week ago. Back in April, Yahoo! Inc. - owner of the once-very-popular

Web-hosting site GeoCities - announced it would shut GeoCities down on Oct. 26, annihilating 15 years of personal Web sites made by millions of people all over the world. This was 90s Internet history, a time when the Internet wasn t as sophisticated and hadn t yet begun to ruin whole industries. GeoCities represented an era; amateur designers and avid hobbyists and Internet enthusiasts made Web pages that, compared with today, were primitive, endearing and earnest. Unless the makers of these sites made copies of or signed up for Yahoo! s paid hosting service, all of that history seems to be gone.

GeoCities was one of the first, and one of the most popular, free Web-hosting services on the Internet. Begun in 1994, the site was originally called Beverly Hills Internet, but was renamed GeoCities in 1995 for the way the sites under its domain were organized into neighborhood directories. Hollywood was for sites centering on movies and entertainment. EnchantedForest was for kids stuff, NapaValley was for wine, Wellesley for topics relating to women, Petsburgh for pets, Area51 for science fiction and fantasy, and so on.

Because of the neighborhood thing, GeoCities users became known as Homesteaders, and there were a million of them by 1997. Many pages were shrines to various cultural niches, with rudimentary, cartoony and chintzy designs, graphics and fonts. Other pages dedicated content to a specific subject, like speaking the Hawaiian language, or 20th-century Polish history. And many others were personal profiles and portfolios, with kind of a MySpace feel to them: rants, blogs, pictures, interests, etc. These sites took, like, minutes to load; the MIDI computerized-music files and bouncing animated GIFs were hilarious, but broadband-challenging.

Dan Flynn, from Franklin, Mass., was a GeoCities user in high school. Flynn is an illustrator for Soup2Nuts, a production company in Watertown, Mass., and his high-school GeoCities account was a collection of the drawings and artwork he worked on as a teenager.

"I remember GeoCities back in the 90s, when you had to code everything yourself," he wrote in an e-mail. "And you couldn t just make a domain name yourself. You had a page of house icons, and each house would be occupied by someone - and you had to skim through dozens of pages until you came across the inevitable house for sale, where you could set up your own Web page. Good times."

In 1999, Yahoo! bought GeoCities and screwed a bunch of things up. They changed the terms of service, declaring themselves sole owners of all GeoCities user-generated content, but later modified those terms when Homesteaders revolted. Then in 2001, Yahoo! implemented a monthly limit on data transfer, which basically meant that if too many people logged onto your site within a month, your site would stop working, unless you upgraded to a paid account. By this time, GeoCities was losing steam, and around 2003, many users sites had stopped working, having been forgotten, retired or abandoned for newer technology.

It s not hard to believe GeoCities stopped making any money. It slipped into technological obsolescence at least five years ago. With Facebook, et al., and with significant improvements in, and higher expectations for, Web design, GeoCities is irrelevant, ugly and limiting, and requires some basic knowledge of code. (Compare it with a site like Tumblr that requires virtually no knowledge of code at all. All you do is plug in your e-mail address and password, then pick a template - you look like a pro.) GeoCities got old and became high-maintenance.

Imagine if you got an e-mail tomorrow that said in six months your Facebook account would totally evaporate unless you started paying for it. As it is right now, every time Facebook modifies its home page, people start freaking out and joining One-Million-Strong-Against-Facebook groups. If Facebook shut down, there d be bloodshed.

David Deyette, an East Hartford 26-year-old who started his GeoCities site when he was 17, was concise in his thoughts about the shutdown.

"It s clearly the end of an era," he wrote in an e-mail. He has nostalgia, but "it is the sort reserved for Surge [soda] or Spider-Man Unlimited. In a way, one has to be glad it s all gone," he wrote. Like Deyette, many are eager to have this proof of their adolescence eliminated and safe from Google s search crawl.

Clive Thompson, who writes frequently about Internet culture and trends as a columnist for /W//ired/ and a contributing writer for the /N//ew York Times Magazine/, said in an e-mail that what interested him about the shut-down is the way it "highlights the weird differences between computer memory and human memory." The second we begin to remember something, it immediately becomes faded or altered or distorted as time goes on and we retread our memories.

"Digital memory, in contrast, is absolutely perfect, a pristine copy of information," he wrote. "[E]xcept when it fails, it fails catastrophically: Either the disk corrupts and you can t read it, or somebody just decides to shut it down or erase it, as Yahoo! is doing to years and years of GeoCities stuff. Our society is increasingly relying on automatic storage of memories, which works really well 99 [percent] of the time, until it doesn t."

Jason Scott, whom I talked to by phone while he was at home in Waltham, Mass, was trying to make copies of as many GeoCities sites as he could before the shutdown, which then was still a couple of weeks away. He d recruited several other people to start making copies as well, which was good, he said, especially if, "God forbid, we end up with two [copies] of something."

Thompson relayed a similar sentiment in his e-mail. "It also reminds me of a point that Cory Doctorow once made," he wrote. "If you really want a piece of information to live forever, you ideally want as many people as possible to make copies of it. Then there s no single point of failure - no central digital brain that can collapse and take your memories along with it."

Scott is the creator of textfiles.com, an archive site of bulletin board systems (which are sort of like forums) about which he made a documentary in 2005. He s a vocal advocate for Internet archiving ("I never delete anything," he said), and he worked with the Internet Archive (also called the "Wayback Machine," at www.archive.org) and various other small-scale projects taking on the very large-scale project of preserving GeoCities sites. (Also, Yahoo!-rival Web-hosting sites like Jimdo launched GeoCities rescue missions: "Lifeboat for GeoCities." And there s also geocities-closing.com.)

But it s difficult even to know how many sites were out there to be saved. Yahoo! won t reveal the exact amount of server space GeoCities used.

"Yahoo! refuses to tell us," Scott said. "They cite privacy of the people, which is kind of like citing the privacy of the people in the house you re burning down."

What Scott and his team do know is that in 1999, Yahoo! bought a 10-terabyte disc array, which, "could mean anything," Scott said. All that tells the archivists is that there may have been as many as 10 terabytes of sites to track down, or seven terabytes, or four. They don t know.

The crew was searching Google for "terms that were big in 95" to find the sites. They would Google "Netscape," for instance. "Another one is Commodore, or Atari ... things that still had kind of a meaning" in the 90s, Scott said. They were looking for "these crazy terms that are of that era."

When they had first started to scan, the archivists were finding hundreds of sites, easily. But as the shutdown date approached, they were dredging the bottom of the Web, grabbing any remaining Homesteads hiding in obscure places, buried in esoteric search terms.

With about two weeks to go, Scoot said he was ’lucky’ if he was able to get a gig or two of new material.

"I ve heard these arguments before: Who cares, it s GeoCities, " said Scott, "which is totally understandable if you re not looking at it from any sort of historical perspective whatsoever. It s totally understandable if you don t remember that time in that fashion, if you kind of stumbled into cable modems in 2004 and now you re like, Who cares, that stuff looks like garbage. " Those people just aren t getting the point, Scott says.

"Dozens and dozens of people are gonna find [these archives]," he says. "This is a very interesting, very vulnerable audience. I am completely sure I have lots of Web sites of people who died, and their Web site is still there."

Erin Brown, a Web site producer living in Ft. Lauderdale, shares Scott s reverence and Thompson s appreciation for the era.

"What stands out to me were the mom-and-pops," she said. "Now sites have a very corporate presence. The mom-and-pops were the best sites you could go to. They were pouring their energy and all of their knowledge into it, trying to be the definitive source on a subject. Nowadays, because it s so easy to use computers and post online, you don t need to have the skills that you needed in the past. [The mom-and-pops] were a much more organic thing. There wasn t that question of Do you trust everything on the Internet? There weren t many voices, so you kind of did."

Say that somehow Scott and his team were able to catch all of these mom-and-pops (maybe even a couple times over). Thompson pointed out the potential and unfortunate problem with archive or storage sites like the Wayback Machine is that even though these sites are storing data, it s not so easy to find it. Google only puts its feelers in so deep.

"[U]nless I m mistaken, Google doesn t crawl the Wayback Machine, so eventually most of those GeoCties sites that once would have turned up on the far, far right end of society s long-tail Google searching will wink out of existence, as far as the searchosphere is concerned," Thompson wrote. "Those sites will only be surfed by people who a) go

looking for information, b) find a link to a long-dead GeoCities site, and then c) are so motivated to read the long-dead site that they take the URL, plug it into the Wayback Machine, and go and retrieve an old copy."

Scott is currently working on a documentary to put a ’human and narrative’ face on GeoCities sites. In the end, Scott predicted that, if they re lucky, the archivists would be able to salvage about 40 percent of the sites created in the 15 years since GeoCities launched. He s proud of that 40 percent, and his hope is that his documentary will deliver a strong message. "This is what we almost lost," he said.

"It s too bad," wrote Thompson, "because many of those GeoCities sites were precisely the sort of ultra-weird personal-obsession sites that are, for me, one of the chief delights of the Internet."

Gmail Signatures Get Fancy with Rich Text Editor

Tired of your bland plain text Gmail signature? Want to spice it up with your company logo and some bold formatting? Google has done you right - now Gmail signatures support rich text format.

Here’s how you can transform your contact information into an eye-catcher:

* Sign into your Gmail account
* Access the "Settings" page from the top right-hand corner
* Halfway down the page you’ll see the "Signature" section
* Experiment with photos, hyperlinks, fonts, text sizes, colors, etc.
* Be sure to click "Save Changes" at the bottom of the page

As long as your Gmail signature is turned on, your rich text creation will be appended to the bottom of all outgoing messages.

If you have multiple Gmail accounts, you can customize signatures for each individual account - the ideal way to separate business and pleasure. To find out more about combining your Gmail addresses, check out Google’s help page.

Road warriors beware: rich text signatures are currently not supported in the mobile version of Gmail. You’ll have to connect with the latest desktop version of Gmail.

Also, older versions and the HTML version of Gmail are also not supported. Of course, you can always suggest it.

10 Ways Spam Is Like Vuvuzelas

If you’ve been glued to the World Cup, you’ll know that there’s more to the matches than soccer (football for our international audience). I’m talking about those incessant horns - the vuvuzelas. They’re really catching people’s attention, for all the wrong reasons.

It got me thinking . . . In this week’s Security Levity, *how is a vuvuzela just like spam?*

Vuvuzelas and spam? Have I gone mad? Never fear, dear reader, let me count the ways...

10. It’s continuous and unavoidable

The vuvuzela emits a loud, irritating, continuous noise that’s impossible to avoid - ruining many people’s World Cup experience. Spam is eyecatching, irritating, continuous noise that’s impossible to avoid - ruining many people’s email experience.

9. It didn’t begin this way

The vuvuzela started life ages ago inside dispersed village communities, far away from the mainstream; it only came to worldwide attention within the last 10 to 20 years. Spam started life ages ago (in internet time) inside dispersed USENET communities, far away from the mainstream; it only came to worldwide attention within the last 10-20 years.

8. The "wisdom" of the crowds

The vuvuzela is blown by hordes of people simultaneously. Spam appears to be sent by hordes of (fake people simultaneously.

7. **Sociopathic anonymity.**

Vuvuzela blowers are basically anonymous and don’t care what other people think about their noise. Spammers are basically anonymous and don’t care what other people think about their spam.

** 6. It’s unhealthy**

The vuvuzela is a health concern for other people in the crowd, due to its loudness - a staggering 120 dB(A) at 3 ft. /Spam that advertises fake pills is a health concern for other email users - the pills can be poisonous, or at least ineffective./

5. "It’s my right"

Some Southern African people see blowing the vuvuzela as their cultural right. /Some West African people see scamming westerners via "419" spam as their cultural right (or, at least, as fair retribution for imperialist acts)./

4. Infection vectors

Vuvuzelas are said to spread bacterial and viral infection, in a similar way to coughing, but far more effectively. Spam can spread Trojan and virus infection, in a similar way to USB keys, but far more effectively.

3. Found in other places

The vuvuzela phenomenon has spread outside of soccer, into venues such as YouTube. The spam phenomenon has spread outside of email into venues such as YouTube (and the comments below!)

2. It’s illegal, theoretically

Authorities in many countries are trying to ban the use of the vuvuzela, with limited success. Authorities in many countries are trying to ban

spam, with limited success.

1. The only workable plan: filter it

Technologists have tried to filter the noise, initially with poor results - also filtering the commentary - but with increasing sophistication and success (including the use of adaptive filters). Technologists have tried to filter spam, initially with poor results - also filtering legitimate email - but with increasing sophistication and success (including the use of adaptive filters).

* Yes, I think you'll agree: vuvuzelas are remarkably like spam!*

Prince: 'The Internet's Completely Over'

Well, that's that then.

Funk-rocker and current Jehovah's Witness
The-Man-We're-Now-Calling-Prince-Again declared that the Internet is "completely over," in an interview with the U.K. tabloid The Daily Mirror over the weekend.

"The internet's completely over," Prince told the paper. "I don't see why I should give my new music to iTunes or anyone else. They won't pay me an advance for it and then they get angry when they can't get it."

The Purple One allowed reporter Peter Willis exclusive access to his Minneapolis mansion, where Willis played drums alongside Prince in his in-house concert hall. The reason? The release of Prince's latest album, 20TEN, which inexplicably will be released as a free insert inside the paper this coming Saturday. Prince, his wife, and three backup singers, partied with still water, fruit smoothies and melon.

Prince has also banned YouTube and iTunes from using any of his music, and has shut down his Web site. Apparently, the Internet's time has come and gone.

"The internet's like MTV. At one time MTV was hip and suddenly it became outdated. Anyway, all these computers and digital gadgets are no good.

"They just fill your head with numbers and that can't be good for you."

Prince also said he believed that playing electric guitar has helped him keep his hair, apparently in an attempt to regain the crown of "oddest 80s pop icon," a title that Michael Jackson's death has left vacant.

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